

## Inevitable

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# **Inevitable**

by [Elywyngirlie](#)

## Summary

He gave her the first 100 years of her endless life, assuming it would teach her.

Now he will come from the next.

Time is the punishment that they bear, even though she could not, or would not, see it.

Not at first anyways.

This is how he agreed to the bargain. The inexorable push and pull would soon strip the poignancy from her. But that didn't mean he wouldn't linger.

He was there in the shadows of the trees when she buried the tracker. He knew she could feel him along their connection, withered and weak, untended by mutual agreement. It would snap to life with a bit of coaxing, but neither would yield, by mutual agreement. Ruling took much of his time, anyways. And her peasant life, her tracker, their children, consumed her.

The inevitability of the tracker's death had reverberated along the tether and her grief hung like a miasma, a shawl layered upon others that he wore. He wondered if she could bear it. His had become familiar to him, another hard flint layer that had settled into flesh. Centuries of it. He lifted his head from the never ending paperwork and allowed his mind to drift across the ocean to Novyi Zem, to the farming settlement they had chosen to live out their bargain.

He knew their bargain had trailed after them like an executioner's promise.

She took comfort in her children. But it could never last. The whispers were gaining strength--how Dimitri's wife never aged, how she still retained a childlike beauty, how she could make light dance across the stream. How she seemed poised between two worlds. A ghost of a person with her ethereal crown of light. The rumblings grew louder and the pyre built and Alina barely fled with her and her children's lives.

He could have mocked her then. The insult, the reminder that no one was like them, sat on his lips, wanting to be sprung. With patience borne of centuries of holding his tongue until it bled with bitterness, he reeled it in and ordered his shadows to follow her. As always.

By mutual agreement.

He attended to his palace, to Ravka, and to crafting a safe home for all Grisha. He lived up to her promise. He did not encroach on either nation piling armies around him. It would take so little to eviscerate them and an occasional demonstration of his powers did wonders. And he sat at his desk, waiting. He had perfected the art for years as iterations of himself sat beside lackluster, lifeless, limpid rulers who plagued Ravka as he built a movement to his moment of triumph.

As dismal as it had turned out to be.

Until one day, in a tunnel of lonely years consumed by work, he felt the tether weakly bloom to life. He tilted his head back, the weak sun brushing his ageless features, and fed the connection a whisper of power. She sprouted beside him, her white hair in a coil of braids, her face as unlined as his, her eyes heavy with grief. Hollow. Time had carved her away, worn her thin, the endlessly relenting march of minutes against the stone heart that was hers until all that was left was sand.

He savored her pain, a delicacy that he had sipped for years.

“You know what I want to say. But I’m not here for you to gloat,” she whispered, voice cracked with disuse.

He arched a brow. “All alone, Alina? It’s the only time you ever reached for me.”

“The grandchildren cannot see me. None of them are like me.” Time has slid them away from her, like water through a sieve.

“No one is like us.” His oft-repeated words were weary from use. Why had it taken her a century to understand? He rose then and called his shadows to him. It was so easy to master realm jumping that anger at his stupidity had burned for a week. But now, a mere twist, a journey through utter darkness that felt like home, and his boots crunched on frost dipped grass.

There was the barest promise of spring in this pocket of the world. He stood in an orchard filled with slender trees with tight, pale green tipped branches and the chatter of birds, soft as if they were afraid to celebrate winter's demise just yet. Watery sunlight slid through a shroud of clouds to warm the air around them. She stood, hands folded, in her rough spun peasant garb, unsurprised to see him.

"You knew it would be like this." She did not hide the venom in her voice. "That bargain you made was a lie."

He snorted. "Was it? I promised you a life with your tracker. All the peasant dreams you wanted. You insisted you would find a way to be like him. And here you are, Alina. Forty years after his death and not a day older from the moment we parted." His nostrils flared as impatience and resentment warred for a chance to give her a taste of his power. A reminder of what she could have been.

She sulked then and that flash of irritation, that kernel of worry that she was more work than she was worth, rose within him again.

"And, I suppose in all your time, you didn't bother to summon? Allowed yourself to become an ordinary woman to please him," he sneered and had barely a second to throw up shadows to stop himself from being sliced by a million of little Cuts. She had gone small rather than large. A careful inversion of her power. But it was the buffet of wind and the downpouring of rain that startled him the most and he let her glimpse his pleasure as he buffeted them back.

"You have learned."

"Aren't we all things?" she tossed back, the glimmer of pride and ego stamped on her elfin features.

He held out his hand to her. "Come now, Alina. I have upheld my bargain. 100 years of the life you wanted. Now you owe me the next 100."

Her lip trembled and her brown eyes flashed.

“And then I decide?”

He inclined his head in what he knew was a cold and regal gesture. Thousands of years had carved out any semblance of humanity as they would to her. She would see.

“Time to keep your word, Sun Summoner.” He beckoned her and she hesitated before sliding her fingers against his. He repressed any shiver at the simple warmth she coaxed from him, at the tremble he felt ripple through her.

“We are inevitable, Alina,” he murmured as the shadows wafted around them, a cool embrace. And then they were gone.

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